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ART. III. — *The Vision ; or Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise* of DANTE ALIGHIERI. Translated by REV. HENRY FRANCIS CARY, A. M. New York : D. Appleton & Co. 1845. 12mo. pp. 587.

WE rejoice to see an American edition of Cary's Dante, which, in its general execution, leaves little to be desired by the lovers of the poet. It is about thirty years since Mr. Cary gave to the public his translation of Dante, and to him the English reader is indebted for the first complete and nearly adequate idea of the great Italian. The translators who preceded him either tried their skill only on small fragments of the poem, or utterly failed in transferring its spirit to the English. The translator's task is always a delicate one ; a poet alone can translate a poet ; and even then, with the best abilities he can bring to the task, the finer effluence of the poetry is apt to escape. Words in the original may be highly poetical, made so by associations which have grown to them and given them a hue, like the weather-stains on the marble pillars of old temples, — while the corresponding words in the other language may be only simple and prosaic terms. Whether the translator confine himself closely to his master, as Cary does for the most part, — or departs widely from his author, and supplies an obscurity or a defect of language by a liberal paraphrase, as Coleridge occasionally does in his version of *Wallenstein*, — the translation, in either case, is but an approximation to the original.

Whatever difficulties there may be in rightly estimating foreign poets, from peculiarity of dialect, national characteristics, or the temper of their times, are to be found in full force with respect to Dante. We read him slowly, by piecemeal, and fritter away our interest by dwelling upon details, instead of swelling the mind to comprehend the one grand whole. We are studying grammar, not poetry ; the Italian language, the old Italian, nervous, knotty, and involved, instead of the *Divina Commedia*. We are examining an immense cathedral with a microscope ; and though even then we must often admire the polish of the marbles and the beauty of the mosaics, we may oftener be troubled, because this buttress is too rough and that pillar too big, this angel's cheeks too fat, and that sculptured saint too lean.

After all, we must throw away our microscope and stand off, if we would see the whole and not merely the parts. We must watch the light playing upon its lofty spires, we must walk through its silent aisles, we must sit down and meditate in its sombre recesses, if we would bring our souls into harmony with the mighty structure. For the remedy of all the difficulties which for a long time prevented the great poet of Italy from being justly appreciated by English readers, we are greatly indebted to Mr. Cary, whose fourth edition, prepared but a short time before his recent death, is now before us. We trust no apology is needed for making it the occasion, after so long a silence on the topic, of bringing again before our readers one of the "all Etruscan three" and his great work. Besides the prominent interest which the poet himself inspires, many reasons might be adduced to show, that a consideration of his genius and the circumstances under which it was developed is no unfruitful work for the student of English literature. One is, that Italy was at that time, and for years afterward, the great fountain of learning and refinement. It was at the head of Christendom. Italian poetry, also, became familiar at an early period to the English, and exerted a marked influence upon their literature. Almost every English poet, from Chaucer to Dryden, drew something from the Italian, or from events in Italian history. We might add, as a third and more particular reason, that Dante, of all poets, shows most entirely the spirit of his age and of the preceding ages, gave the strongest impulse to other poets, and especially that he and Milton have at the same time such near affinities and such marked diversities.

The biography of Dante is brief and meagre. He was born in Florence, in May, 1265, and died at Ravenna, in July or September, 1321, seven years before the birth of Chaucer, and more than seventy before the *Canterbury Tales* were written. His family was ancient and honorable; his education complete, according to the idea of his times; his accomplishments liberal and manly. He studied at the Universities of Bologna and Padua, and, it is said, urged by his eagerness for learning, travelled to Paris, and even to Oxford. While yet in his boyhood, he became acquainted with Beatrice Portinari, a beautiful Florentine of his own rank, and but a year younger than himself. In his own graceful and elevating language, he tells us how they saw each other, how

he loved her, how they were parted, and how she died at the age of twenty four, and became a saint in heaven. As the poet grew in years and learning, he acquired fame in battle and honor as a magistrate and ambassador. At the age of thirty-five he became chief of the priors, and seems to have been an active and energetic member of the government. He proposed some of the most vigorous measures for healing the wounds of the state, and at the time of his sentence of exile was ambassador to the pope.

The times in which he lived were peculiarly turbulent and perilous. Men's passions both for good and evil, the contests of freedom and tyranny, were fierce and uncontrolled. The Italian republics were in the full enjoyment of their irregular and vehement liberty. Great cities had grown up in all the north of Italy, and each city had its dependent surrounding territory, its prince or its nobles, and its factions. The great contest between the Church and the Emperor, a contest begun by Hildebrand two centuries before, was not yet laid to rest. Italy fought against Germany and Germany against Italy, and with varied success. The thirteenth and fourteenth centuries were periods of almost ceaseless conflicts, either between the two great parties of the North and the South, or between factions which were rife in every town, and only kept in abeyance by the pressure of a great and common danger. Frederick Barbarossa had ravaged Italy, but he could not subdue it. In 1162, he razed Milan to the ground; in 1167, it was rebuilt by all the cities in the League of Lombardy, a league of all parties for the defence of the common liberty against a common enemy. Innocent the Third had reasserted the power of the church with all the vigor of Gregory the Seventh, and lent the might of his spiritual forces to whatever prince would in turn augment the authority of the pope.

In the midst of these complicated and long-continued distractions, had grown up the great maritime powers of Venice, Genoa, and Pisa. Their fleets were united in every part of the Great Sea to chastise the Turks and the pirates, — or, delivered from the fear of those barbarous foes, fought with equal fury among themselves for supremacy. Venice had already consolidated her vigorous aristocracy; her merchants were princes. “Genoa la superba,” around its splendid gulf, had built up palaces, which are now, after six

centuries, the admiration of travellers, as they were then. She had humbled the power of Pisa by a terrible victory, and compelled Venice to sue for peace. She maintained military and mercantile colonies at St. Jean d'Acre in the Holy Land, at Pera opposite to Constantinople, and at Caffa in the Black Sea. Architecture had begun to flourish. Pisa was celebrated for its "profusion of marble, its patrician towers, and its grave magnificence"; and in one "sacred corner" there stood then, as now, its Leaning Tower, its Cathedral, its Baptistery, and its Campo Santo. The stately Palazzo Vecchio at Florence had been built, and the churches of St. Croce and St. Maria were begun; it is curious to add, they are not finished yet. With the genius of Casella, Cimabue, and Giotto, began a new era for music, painting, and sculpture, and Andrea de' Pisa had cast those bronze doors for the Baptistery at Florence which Michel Angelo used to say were worthy to be the gates of paradise. The cities, according to Sismondi, were surrounded with walls, and paved with flat stones, while the inhabitants of Paris could not stir out of their houses without plunging into the mud.

It was also an age not undistinguished by great men; the age of Roger Bacon, of Albertus Magnus, of Bonaventura, Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus, of Thomas the Rhymer and Marco Polo, of Sir William Wallace and Edward the First. It was an age of immense activity, of power, and wealth, and splendor, but not of justice or freedom. Not only did city fight against city with the fury of insanity, where all true policy would have taught them to combine for mutual assistance and support; but every city was torn by the fiercest factions. Every street was the scene of a battle. The Coliseum, the tombs of Adrian, and Augustus, and Cecilia Metella, the arches and the temples of Rome, were turned into fortresses. The sombre architecture of the old palaces, with their lower stories of solid masonry, and the few loopholes grated with iron, show to the modern that a man's house was then literally his castle. The most bitter and cruel factions were those of the Guelphs and Ghibelines. Through circumstances which we need not turn aside to detail, the names of two German families became the rallying words of parties which for three hundred years were relentless in their hatred. The Guelphs were general-

ly in favor of the freedom of the Italian cities, and as generally had the church on their side. The Ghibelines sympathized for the most part with the German emperor. Powerful families of both these factions inhabited every city, and it required but a slight circumstance to fan into a flame the latent fire of controversy. The picture which Bulwer gives in his *Rienzi*, of the strife between the Colonna and Orsini, had probably a thousand counterparts. Success oscillated from one side to the other, and the fierceness of each party could be measured only by that of its rival. On this troubled theatre was Dante to act his part, to bear his sorrows, to exhibit his greatness. Disappointments less keen and sufferings less severe would have left him a more joyous life, but the vast capacities of his spirit might have remained to us for ever unrevealed.

Of all the cities of Italy, Florence was dignified by the most learned men, and by the greatest love of justice and of freedom. According to Sismondi, its judicial institutions were the first which offered any guaranty to the citizen. Yet Florence was torn by fierce party spirit. Only five years before Dante was born, the Ghibelines entirely expelled the Guelphs from its precincts, and would have razed the city to the ground, had not their leader, Farinata degli Uberti, a man of equal military skill, honor, and eloquence, protested against the barbarity. A more bitter strife still, and one pregnant with sorrow for the poet, sprang from an obscurer source. A powerful Guelph family, the Cancellieri, was divided into two branches, the Bianchi and Neri, or Whites and Blacks. Between these branches had arisen a quarrel marked with singular bitterness and atrocity even for that fierce age. All Tuscany became at last involved in the strife, and for a moment the names of Guelph and Ghibeline were forgotten in the watchwords of the new factions. Dante joined the Bianchi; the Neri were successful, and the greatest citizen of Florence, with six hundred other persons, was driven into exile, his possessions given up to pillage or confiscated, and he was sentenced, if taken, to be burnt.\* Thenceforth there was no more hope for him in this world, for banishment was more bitter than death. He made several efforts to recover his standing in Florence, but

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\* For the terms of this decree, see Tiraboschi, Vol. V., part 2, p. 481.

without effect. For twenty-one years he found no permanent home, living at Arezzo, at Padua, at Verona, at Ravenna, or wandering as an exile through almost every part of Italy. It is said that the Florentines, after sixteen years of the poet's banishment had passed away, gave him leave to return, on the dishonorable condition of paying a fine and making a public avowal of his offence ; — gave *him* leave, for whose bones their children begged again and again, through the powerful intervention of Pope Leo the Tenth, and the eloquent lips of Michel Angelo, and begged in vain. These conditions by no means suited the lofty spirit of Dante. He would eagerly come as a loyal and loving citizen, — as a criminal and a slave, never. At Ravenna, where he found his last and most liberal patron, the drama of his melancholy life drew towards its last scene.

On the fourteenth of September, 1321, according to the best authorities, on the day when the Roman church celebrates the exaltation of the Holy Cross, chagrined at the failure of an embassy to Venice on behalf of his patron, and worn out with sorrow and disappointment, wrapped in the coarse garb of a friar, he lay down to die. From before his eyes this vain world was passing away. No requiems were sung ; no crowds hurried through the streets to inquire how it fared with the great poet. Italy knew not her true glory ; she had not begun to scatter her incense. Alone, an exile, in the palace of a friend, Guido Novello da Polenta, but not in Florence, he sunk to rest. He was ushered into that world of whose mysteries he had sung. He went to take up his abode, if hope is a true prophet,

“ With those just spirits that wear victorious palms,  
Hymns devout and holy psalms  
Singing everlastingly.”

After he was dead, the robe and cowl of the monk were exchanged for the vestments of the poet. His obsequies were worthily solemnized, and the mortal remains of him whom Florence had despised and vainly tried to dishonor were quietly and affectionately laid in their sepulchre, by one whose name the lovers of the poet will not let die ; and the city where they repose shall attract reverent pilgrims from all lands, shall be one of the holy places of the imagination for evermore.

Among the minor works of Dante is a treatise *De Monar-*

*chia*, in which he defends the emperor against the pope, — and two books *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, which contain a criticism on poetry, particularly the vernacular poetry of Italy. These works are in Latin. Besides these, he wrote in Italian the *Vita Nuova*, containing an account of his attachment to Beatrice, and the *Convito*, which explains at length the sense of some of his Canzoni. His sonnets have been excellently translated by Mr. Lyell. But his great work was the *Divina Commedia*, talked of by all, praised by the many, read and loved by the few. To this we shall chiefly confine our remarks.

One cannot read half a canto of Dante without feeling that his poem was the great and serious labor of his life ; as earnest an intellectual labor, one would think, as was ever performed. By literary men, scholars, and poets, we frequently understand fine gentlemen, merry of heart and jovial in intercourse, living at their ease, quiet and happy. But Dante was neither quiet nor happy. There was no trifling upon his lips, and little gayety in his heart. His comedy was more serious than the tragedy of most men. In his laughter there are tears : —

“Seldom he smiled ; and smiled in such a sort  
As if he mocked himself, and scorned his spirit  
That could be moved to smile at any thing.”

What would be humor in others is, in him, concentrated to sarcasm and bitterness. His earnestness and intensity as much inform every page of his work, as Milton's sublimity does the *Paradise Lost*. What a sombre world he lived in ! How many shadows overhung his pathway ! How deep a gloom darkened the sky of Tuscany ! How many of the sharp stings of faction pierced his bosom ! His spirit was withdrawn from the world ; he lived among men, but not of them, — forced, from very lack of sympathy, to withdraw within himself, — with a high ideal before him of the glory and power of Italy, but with no means of realizing it, — looking out from the “loopholes of retreat,” upon a degraded state, upon a degraded religion ! He saw the church administered by vicious prelates ; now cringing to a foreign power, now herself playing the tyrant. And Italy, that beautiful land, unrivalled in arts, in learning, in refinement, the mistress of the Great Sea, the spiritual mistress of the world, instead of growing great by harmonious counsels, rent all in pieces by the most selfish factions.



“ Ah, slavish Italy ! thou inn of grief !  
 Vessel without a pilot in loud storm !  
 Lady no longer of fair provinces,  
 But brothel-house impure ! . . . . .  
 . . . . . While now thy living ones  
 In thee abide not without war ; and one  
 Malicious gnaws another ; ay, of those  
 Whom the same wall and the same moat contains.  
 Seek, wretched one ! around thy sea-coasts wide ;  
 Then homeward to thy bosom turn ; and mark,  
 If any part of thee sweet peace enjoy.”

*Purgatory, Canto vi., l. 76.*

Emphatic words, nearly as true now as then ; which might have suggested some stanzas to Byron, had any thing more been necessary to awaken the sorrow and indignation of the fiery poet, than to dwell in constant sight of so much beauty and so much oppression.

But Dante wrote as no foreigner can write, with the sorrow and bitterness of a disappointed and injured son. He knew what it was to fall from honor to ignominy. Florence, “ *parvi mater amoris*,” whom yet with all her faults he loved with true filial affection, cast him forth from her walls. He learned how hard are those steps which lead to a patron’s door ; he ate the most bitter bread, the bread of charity, doled out with reluctant hands.

The sadness with which he speaks of this banishment is very touching and very beautiful.

“ Alas,” said he, “ had it pleased the Dispenser of the universe that the occasion of this excuse had never existed ; that neither others had committed wrong against me, nor I suffered unjustly ; suffered, I say, the punishment of exile and poverty ; since it was the pleasure of the citizens of that fairest and most renowned daughter of Rome, Florence, to cast me forth out of her sweet bosom, in which I had my birth and nourishment even to the ripeness of my age, and in which, with her good-will, I desire with all my heart to rest this wearied spirit of mine, and to terminate the time allotted to me on earth. Wandering over almost every part to which this our language extends, I have gone about like a mendicant, showing against my will the wound with which fortune has smitten me, and which is often imputed to his ill-deserving, on whom it is inflicted. I have, indeed, been a vessel without sail and without steerage, carried about to divers ports, and roads, and shores, by the dry wind that

springs out of sad poverty ; and have appeared before the eyes of many, who, perhaps, from some report that had reached them, had imagined me of a different form ; in whose sight not only my person was disparaged, but every action of mine became of less value, as well already performed, as those which yet remained for me to attempt." — *Life of Dante*.

It is easy to see why his poem could not have been to him merely a pleasant recreation. It was the sorrowful music of a melancholy heart. Melancholy — not ill-nature, but a certain sadness and depression, from an intense view of life, its complicated relations and destiny — is, as we have been told, an attribute of every profound poetical genius. How otherwise, in a world like ours, would the poet be capable of that comprehensive sympathy which is his peculiar glory ? How could he awaken those profound affections and passions which lend their life and power to tragedy ? How present vividly before us those awful catastrophes, which few only are actually called to suffer, but which many imagine they see hanging before them in the dimness of the future ? A profound insight into the soul, a sense of its immense capacities, its wants, its aspirations, its disappointments, its sins, its mysterious destiny, — this must sometimes press upon the mind with an almost insupportable weight. But the great poet sees all this as by intuition, — sees it magnified and rendered intense by a domineering imagination, and feels it with that superior sympathy which is given him for his greater glory and his greater pain. It is this deeper sympathy with the melancholy phases of life, combined with a loftier enthusiasm and a more sustained power of thought, which forms one characteristic of the epic or tragic poet as distinguished from the comic ; and which assign him not only a different, but a more exalted sphere. Lacking this appreciation of the sorrows of humanity, the poet may revel in wit and humor, may produce his unequalled comedy or scorching satire, but there is a broader and richer field which he can never enter ; there are " glory-smitten summits of the poetic mountain " to which he can never attain.

It is a part of the poet's mission to give an intense and musical expression to the feelings and sentiments of the common heart of humanity ; to catch from the world all its sombre and its gay hues, and to reflect them with different forms and wider significance ; and in proportion to the universality

of his genius will be his power of developing the most various phases of human experience. We count in units those who have been equally at home in the grave and the lively, — in the grandeur of lofty thought and quiet contemplation, and in the beauty of simple and artless melodies ; but every poet who makes large excursions through the domain of thought and feeling must make trial of that inheritance of sorrow, of which, from his very nature, he must partake more largely than his fellows.

Homer, so full of the pomp and circumstance of glorious war, does not shut his eyes to its miseries. He shows us the hearts which it lacerates, the homes which it makes desolate, the household gods which it destroys. He leads us in with old gray-headed Priam, that we may hear the pleading of a father for the dead body of his son, and see the tears of the divine Achilles. How profoundly mournful are many of the pages of Milton ! a spirit of sorrow broods over his whole work. Spenser is continually turning one's view aside from the brighter scenes, by some picture which disposes us to contemplation, and, before we are aware, solemn thoughts come stealing over the mind, as they would if we were walking alone in a great cathedral. Even Chaucer, with all his gayety, now and then tinges his pictures with hues more dark and foreboding ; the beautiful freshness of the morning is sometimes overshadowed. And in the great dramatists, in their great master, above all, how much is there which suits the temper of grief, — expressions which supply just the word to the craving and desolate affections, to say nothing of the awful tragedies which almost crush the soul that yields to them without restraint !

But that which, in most great poets, is comparatively a subordinate, though essential characteristic, is, with Dante, one of the most prominent. He does not dally and play with sorrow as those do who have never experienced it, and who therefore covet some semblance of it as a relief from the tedium of uninterrupted enjoyment.

“ Nothing so dainty sweet as lonely melancholy ”

is a choice line of Beaumont and Fletcher ;\* but Dante never could have uttered it. His sorrow is seen, not in the fine things which he says about it, but in the whole tenor of his

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\* *The Nice Valour*, Act III., Scene 3.

thoughts, the indwelling spirit of the Divine Comedy. It gave birth to those words of mingled scorn and sadness which made him feared while he was loved. It drew those solemn lines upon his face, which give so much expression and truth to the rudest image of him which the Italian stamps in glass or cuts in lava. The face of Dante is very noticeable. Coleridge once said, that all men of genius have something feminine in their expression. Whether it be so of all, we do not affirm ; but over the countenance of Dante is cast a veil of softness and delicacy which attempers its sternness, covers, and, if we may so speak, drives inward, the sorrow which it cannot conceal.

We trust there is no need of our venturing on that most unsatisfactory of all things, the abstract of a poem, in order to make our few remarks intelligible to our readers. Of the three portions of the *Divina Commedia*, the *Inferno* has been generally considered the most powerful, as exhibiting the fresh and unwasted strength of the poet. There is, indeed, in it more of the terrible energy of his genius, more that smites the soul as with a thunderbolt ; but some of the finest passages are in the other two parts, particularly in the *Purgatory*. The *Paradise* is, to our mind, too full of learning, and mysteries, and subtile discussions, for the highest poetic effect. Still, the tone of each part is so different from that of the others, and all are so manifestly necessary to complete the idea of Dante, that the objector should be cautious. We are not sure but we should return oftener to the *Purgatory* than to either of the other parts, the air of it is so serene. We emerge into it from all the horrors of the *Inferno*. The murky vapors no longer stifle us. We again behold the mild stars, and breathe freely in the clear air, and listen to the sweet words of penitence and hope.

One cannot fail to notice, on the most careless reading, the intensity of thought and feeling which pervades the whole poem. The images burn into one's heart ; the woe wraps itself about the soul ; yet the poet is not so great, not so terrible, as to be beyond our affections. He draws us to him by his exquisite tenderness, and by his tears makes us weep. A remarkable characteristic of Dante is his distinct delineation of character. Indeed, he does not seem to delineate so much as to create. He speaks the word, and there stand the figures, every lineament sharp and clear, every hue

and expression indelible. They are struck out, as a medalion is, by one blow of the hammer. Capaneus, who lies under the burning shower which he scorns to notice, is a compact image of Milton's Satan.

“ Such as I was  
When living, dead such now I am. If Jove  
Weary his workmen out, from whom in ire  
He snatched the lightnings that at my last day  
Transfixed me, if the rest he weary out,  
At their black smithy laboring by turns,  
In Mongibello, while he cries aloud,  
‘ Help, help, good Mulciber ! ’ as erst he cried  
In the Phlegræan warfare ; and the bolts  
Launch he, full aimed at me, with all his might ;  
He never should enjoy a sweet revenge.”

*Inferno*, Canto xiv.

For quiet beauty of picture, nothing can exceed those emblems graven on the rocks in Purgatory. One is David, who

“ Onward came  
With light dance leaping, girt in humble guise,  
Israel's sweet harper ; in that hap he seemed  
Less, and yet more, than kingly. Opposite,  
At a great palace, from the lattice forth  
Looked Michol, like a lady full of scorn  
And sorrow.”

Another is Trajan : —

“ A widow at his bridle stood, attired  
In tears and mourning. Round about them trooped  
Full throng of knights ; and overhead in gold  
The eagles floated, struggling with the wind.”

*Purgatory*, Canto x.

The eye of the poet is clear and quick for the myriad forms of nature, the lowest and most familiar, as well as the most majestic and terrible. As an example, look at the twenty-second canto of the *Inferno*, where the speculators are immersed in the lake of boiling pitch.

“ As dolphins that, in sign  
To mariners, heave high their arched backs,  
That, thence forewarned, they may advise to save  
Their threatened vessel ; so, at intervals,

To ease the pain, his back some sinner showed,  
Then hid more nimbly than the lightning-glance."

*Inferno*, Canto xxii.

Every boy who has watched a frog-pond can see the truth of what follows.

"E'en as the frogs, that of a watery moat  
Stand at the brink, with the jaws only out,  
Their feet and of the trunk all else concealed,  
Thus on each part the sinners stood ; but soon  
As Barbariccia was at hand, so they  
Drew back under the wave. I saw, and yet  
My heart doth stagger, one that waited thus,  
As it befalls that oft one frog remains,  
While the next springs away ; and Graffiacan,  
Who of the fiends was nearest, grappling seized  
His clotted locks, and dragged him sprawling up,  
That he appeared to me an otter." — *Ib.*

Observe, too, the picture which follows. The sinner thus drawn out for new torments, by some craft, got away, and hurried to the lake of pitch. The two demons pursued, but he dived down and escaped, while they turned back enraged.

"E'en thus the waterfowl, when she perceives  
The falcon near, dives instant down, while he,  
Enraged and spent, retires. That mockery  
In Calcabrina fury stirred, who flew  
After him, with desire of strife inflamed ;  
And — for the barterer had 'scaped — so turned  
His talons on his comrade. O'er the dike  
In grapple close they joined ; but the other proved  
A goshawk able to rend well his foe ;  
And in the boiling lake both fell. The heat  
Was umpire soon between them ; but in vain  
To lift themselves they strove, so fast were glued  
Their pennons." — *Ib.*

For extreme vividness of picture, which the dullest imagination cannot help visibly portraying, we might turn to the burning tombs, square and massive, the lids half raised, in which heretics met their fate ; to the vermilion towers of the city of Dis ; to the split and cleft bodies of the schismatics ; to the evil councillors, each "swathed in confining fire," little columns of flame, every one enveloping a sinner, as the blaze of a candle does the wick, so that these moving cones of fire, roaring and waving, filled the whole valley. And, indeed, where should we stop ?

The true poetic sagacity in the use of his materials, in determining how far to venture on ground so new and so sacred, is exhibited throughout the poem, although it is very true that his boldness would not be sanctioned in our day. There is one passage in the *Paradise* where we think the poet shows at once his reverence and his good sense. We mean that in which he is admitted to contemplate the brightness of the Divine Majesty. One would think that he might have committed the fault of certain poets in bringing the Deity down to our form of human speech ; or the grosser fault of some distinguished painters, of making some visible representation of the Eternal, Invisible Spirit ; but he does not. Borne up by the prayers of Beatrice, St. Bernard, the Virgin, and all the saints, he ventured to look upward : —

“ Thenceforward, what I saw  
Was not for words to speak, nor memory’s self  
To stand against such outrage on her skill.  
As one who, from a dream awakened, straight  
All he hath seen forgets, yet still retains  
Impression of the feeling in his dream,  
E’en such am I ; for all the vision dies,  
As ’t were, away ; and yet the sense of sweet,  
That sprang from it, still trickles in my heart.  
Thus in the sun-thaw is the snow unsealed ;  
Thus in the winds on flitting leaves was lost  
The Sibyl’s sentence.” — *Paradise*, Canto xxxiii.

If it be asked why Dante chose such a theme, and especially why, in executing his task, he dwelt so much on the terrible, why he accumulated those grotesque and hideous descriptions of physical suffering, with an ingenuity and invention never excelled, nor perhaps equalled, the answer seems to us not difficult. For a portion of the spirit of his poem, the poet is indebted to his age, — for a portion, to his own genius. Both harmonized in producing the Divine Comedy. We say, then, in reply to the question, such was the spirit of the age, and such was the peculiar genius of the poet. The age was strictly theological and ecclesiastical ; learning, art, science, government, society, bore the clear impress of the church. For it philosophers wrote, art was revived, science was allowed so far, and only so far, as seemed not to conflict with ecclesiastical dogmas, while kings and queens thought it their highest honor to

be styled "defenders of the faith." Now the spirit of these ideas, the very soul of the Middle Ages, is embodied in the poem.

It was not an age of merciful laws nor of mild punishments. Men were put to death for small offences, — they were immured in dungeons, — they were tortured, — they were burnt alive, without a suspicion being excited of cruelty, or of any thing but justice. Less vividness of detail, then, in the poem, less of physical suffering and more of inward and spiritual, would not have suited the rough civilization of the times. What is the pervading idea of the Divine Comedy, but that the future, the limitless future, is determined by the fleeting present ; that time is enveloped by eternity ; — the idea of man's destiny as extending infinitely beyond the present life, — of the utter impossibility of his fulfilling the purposes of his being in his threescore years and ten ? This idea binds together in vigorous unity the three parts of the poem. Perhaps this is one reason why Dante introduces men of every clime and every age, heathen as well as Christian, so as to show the universality of religious sanctions. What is the *Inferno*, but a clear, condensed, terrible assertion of retribution ? Retribution is heard in every wail of every gloomy circle. What is the *Purgatory*, but a call to repentance, a cry for pity and forgiveness ? Though false in theology, it had a lesson in it which would touch every heart, — sorrow for sin, — the possibility of pardon, — expiation. Words of encouragement float on the charmed air ; hosannas are wafted to them as if from the open portals of heaven ; passages of Scripture are uttered by unseen visitants.

We turn to the pilgrim's account of his entrance into the gate of *Purgatory*.

“ Attentively I turned,  
Listening the thunder that first issued forth ;  
And ‘ We praise thee, O God ! ’ methought I heard,  
In accents blended with sweet melody.  
The strain came o’er mine ear, e’en as the sound  
Of choral voices, that in solemn chant  
With organ mingle, and now high and clear  
Come swelling, now float indistinct away.”

*Purgatory, Canto ix.*

The souls go on weeping ; they are crushed, and grovel on the earth ; but they complain not ; still there is hope for



them. Five hundred years one had been there, and ages must pass before he would be purified, but he complained not ; he was directing his way, however slow and sorrowful, to the "waters of peace." And when a soul *was* released, the whole mountain shook for joy.

What is the Paradise but the consummation of all good, — the triumph of infinite compassion, — the joy of redeemed, released, eternally happy spirits ? They have endured the trial, and are reaping the reward in the company of the wisest and best of earth, and under guidance of the highest in heaven.

We have said that the genius of the poet suggests a still further explanation of the origin and character of the poem. We may say of him, as the profoundest of our poets said of the earliest of our novelists : — "The energies of his soul were melancholy powers, and their path lay along the dusky dwelling-places of superstition, and fear, and death, and woe." He must have felt both the vanity and the grandeur of life ; must, at any rate, have had those thoughts that "wander through eternity." He had tried to satisfy himself with the earth, and the earth had frowned upon him. He sought, with how much eagerness we know, to repose his soul, and reap his civic honors, in the city of his birth and of his love. To her he clung, a loving child, and would have found his honor and happiness in contributing to her prosperity and wisely administering her laws ; but the harsh mother sternly shook him from her, and bade him elsewhere seek his fortune and his fame. To what, then, should he turn his thoughts, but to that world where the decisions of time are so often reversed, and the weary and disappointed soul may find rest ?

Besides this, we know, that, in certain states of mental distress, the mind seeks relief in scenes of outward violence and danger. It demands the excitement without to allay the fever within. Men rush into battle to appease the anguish of their souls. So Shakspeare represents Lear as talking with the tempest, and finding something congenial and soothing in the pelting of the rain and the roaring of the wind. Byron, we know, loved to ride on horseback in the storm ; it suited his humor. Grief instinctively seeks and finds relief in some outward manifestation of itself. It is only a sorrow which utterly crushes the heart, that is silent and tearless. Homer represents the divine Achilles as refresh-

ing his soul with tears. "For," says Hegel,\* "even in tears lies consolation. Man, when entirely absorbed in his sorrow, demands at least the outward manifestation of this inward pain. But the expression of these feelings by means of words, pictures, tones, and forms is still more softening; and therefore it was a good custom of the ancients to have female mourners at deaths and burials, as it brought grief into contemplation in its external form; or, more especially, as it showed the mourner his own grief expressed by others. For thus the whole subject of his sorrow would be brought under his view, and he would be compelled, by its frequent repetition, to reflect upon it, and so would be relieved. Thus abundant tears and many words have always been found the surest means of throwing off the overwhelming weight of sorrow, or at least of relieving the oppressed heart."

May there not have been some powers like these at work in Dante? He was disappointed, dishonored, impoverished, exiled; his domestic life was unhappy; for years he went about with corroding anxiety at his heart; his only inheritance was sorrow. Did he not find, in depicting the gloomy scenes of the *Inferno*, — those circles after circles of sorrow and woe, — some assuaging of his continual melancholy? Did not these living and fiery pictures fit well the temper of his grief, and really comfort him? There was depth in his sorrow as in his love; neither played upon the surface of his affections, but went through and through him. His laboring heart yearned to utter itself; it must do so, or he must die; and what he believed and felt so intensely he must speak with corresponding vehemence. Under the influence, too, of heavy misfortune, or in the anticipation of dreaded calamities, the mind is sometimes remarkably clear; conventional reserve is gone; the false coverings of things are stripped off; the recesses of the heart are disclosed. We are not sure but that there was a still deeper cause in the experience of the poet. Nothing great and original in literature can be produced but from one's own profound and often painful experience. Your "honest, fair, worthy, square, good-looking, well-meaning, regular, uniform, straight-forward, clock-work, clear-headed, one-like-another, salubrious, upright

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\* We quote from a translated fragment of his *Æsthetics*.

kind of people" (as the author of *Salmagundi* calls them) have no materials in their spiritual storehouse for the beautiful or sublime structures of art. For these another sort of life is required. No such "salubrious" man was Dante. His was a soul that had warfare. He had engaged in spiritual conflicts. For him, too, there was a future world of terrible and endless sorrow, or of unspeakable felicity. He dwelt in the depths. He uttered his voice *de profundis*. Such a mind is not to be envied, but to be looked at with wonder, and reverence, and sympathy; for it was sent to this earth, not for its own enjoyment, but to give utterance to the universal hopes and fears of men, to bear a part in the great changes of society, to mark one of its epochs, to give a name and glory to a great people. Several passages in the poem, such as the marks for the seven sins drawn by the angel on his forehead as he entered Purgatory, — his rebuke by Beatrice, and subsequent repentance, — his apparently overwhelming sense of the divine justice, as well as the whole tone of both the *Inferno* and the *Purgatory*, make it seem more than possible that he had felt a deep self-condemnation, and had sought for expiation and pardon. This may have somewhat affected the style of the poem. He might perhaps have said, as Bunyan did, "I could have stepped into a style much higher than this in which I have here discoursed, and could have adorned all things more than I have seemed to do; but I dare not. God did not play, in tempting of me; neither did I play, when I sank as into a bottomless pit, when the pangs of hell caught hold upon me; wherefore I may not play, in relating of them."

Dante was a stern, just man. One cannot but admire the intrepidity, the audacity even, with which he attacks the reigning vices and crimes of the day. Neither power, nor rank, nor the church itself, shielded the criminal. Nobles and kings, monks, priests, bishops, cardinals, and popes, the very successors of St. Peter, who once held in their hands the keys which opened and shut the kingdom of heaven, work out their penance, or suffer their endless punishment, in his scheme of justice. To consider the poem, as some once did, to be merely a covert method of taking revenge on his enemies, is not within the limits of the slenderest probability. Such littleness of spirit could not produce so grand a work. He may, indeed, for aught we know, have imposed some

pains and penalties upon his relentless persecutors, as Da Vinci is said to have made Judas, in his great picture, the exact counterpart of the obnoxious prior, — and as Michel Angelo immortalized one of his troublesome enemies by putting his face on the body of a devil. He may occasionally have done something like this, for he was a man, — a man who had suffered many and grievous wrongs; but who can imagine such a vindictive spirit carried through his immortal work? Besides, some of his own kith and kin are found in the dreary rounds. His great-grandfather had been in purgatory a hundred years. His teacher Brunetto fared still worse; and Francesca, the daughter of his friend, poor Francesca, who, perhaps, as Carlyle finely says, “may have sat upon the poet’s knee as a bright, innocent little child,” she too is “whirled away in the racking winds for ever, for ever.” Dante was no coarse, vulgar, selfish man, pitifully to obtrude his private animosities into such a solemn and grand subject. We are sure of it. He had loved too deeply, had suffered too keenly, to do so. Those who imagine it have, we conceive, entirely misunderstood his noble nature; forgotten his intense patriotism, his Italian spirit, his extreme sensibility, his great wrongs through those who had wronged his country, and the recent and exciting nature of the events. The moral tone of the poem is as remarkable as any part of it. The immoralities of the age have no reflection here. Some of the scenes may be incongruous, but as a whole it is decidedly Christian. There are a few, comparatively very few, examples of grossness; but no sentence or verse, we believe not one, which offends the strictest moral purity. The same is said to be true of the *Jerusalem Delivered*. We fear as much cannot be said of Chaucer, or Spenser, or our old dramatists, much as we love them, while in grossness they exceed the great Italian a thousand-fold.

This great poem sprang into sudden and permanent fame, almost immediately after the death of its author. Men were anxious not only to read, but to understand it. Its dark allegories, its recondite and multifarious learning, its obscure allusions to individuals, who were often to be detected only by “their place of residence, their office, or heraldic insignia, their peculiarity of feature, or public actions,” — these all demanded explanations. The stars and the blanks must be taken out, and the true name inserted. Milan, Bologna,

Venice, Pisa, and Vicenza appointed commentators at the public expense. Fifty years after the death of the poet, Florence began to perceive her ancient severity and folly, and appointed Boccaccio, "the bard of prose," to deliver discourses on her banished son. According to the too often repeated example of republics, honor and sympathy were lavished, all too late to cheer him, who, living, would have been comforted by a far more meagre tribute.

The causes of the great and sudden glory of the dead poet are found both in the nature of his subject, and in the power with which he treated it. In the first place, he most happily seized upon the belief of the times. The dogmas of the church were dominant and undisputed throughout Christendom. Purgatory was as real as heaven and hell, and all three had an intense reality both for the common and the educated mind. Few could pass directly from this world to the abodes of the blessed, for very few had kept their "garments so unspotted from the world" as to need no future purification. In the worlds of pain were their fathers, their sons. They themselves, perhaps, were travelling thither. The low wailing which startled them in their dreams, — did it not come from their suffering kinsfolk? Voices and sounds heard in the dark night, — were they not inarticulate supplications for prayer? Every day men were shut up in purgatory for their sins; every day they were delivered from the fire through the intervention of the church. There was an institution then on earth which reached its arms into the invisible world, which held the keys of heaven in its own hands. There were saints in heaven of one's own kin and family, who but yesterday were here, and now, mighty with God in heaven, the just and proper objects of human prayer. There were men in hell, excommunicated and sent there by the terrible authority of an incensed pontiff. The future world was bound to the present by ties the most awful. Hence, to write of that world, and to write with the vividness of the great Italian, was to give the solemnity of truth even to the fiction, and to threats and predictions the sanctity of prophecy. He individualized and rendered definite and particular what the church, in all her teachings, affirmed in general. The monk proclaimed to the listening assembly the terrible retribution which awaited the incorrigible, — the unquenchable fire, the undying worm; but the poet uncovered the abyss beneath

their very feet, and bade them look upon the flaming sepulchres, the lake of burning pitch, the rivers of blood, the frozen seas, the vermilion towers of the city of Dis. Purgatory was no longer to be an indistinct region, for he had shown them the mount rising far away in the distant ocean, with its top almost touching the heavens. And the abodes of the blessed, — they saw them every day, every night. The mild stars which cheered the wayfarer or guided the mariner, the queen of evening, the king of day, were made more beautiful, and were looked upon with a human sympathy, because they were the actual dwelling-places of all that was pure, and good, and great.

The extreme vividness of the poet's descriptions and details touched the curiosity of every Italian. Although necessarily didactic, he borrows the vivacity of the drama, and not so much tells us what took place, as leads us with him, bids us open our ears and hear, and our eyes and see. One might almost make a map of his travels, from the hour when Virgil meets him in the "gloomy wood," to the time when St. Bernard makes in his behalf the last and greatest request; and the whole "vision," even to the thirty-third canto of the Paradise, be a sort of splendid road-book through those unexplored regions. We should not be much surprised to learn that he was interrogated by some of his countrymen for further information, just as Sir Thomas More is said to have been respecting his Utopia. There is an air of common life thrown over even his grandest scenes, which makes them seem natural and true. No metaphor or comparison is out of place with him. Whatever illustration will make the scene more vivid and distinct, how homely soever it be, he does not hesitate to use, because he is writing not to be admired, but to be understood and felt. Hence, he calls in all the aids of memory, of sights and sounds, of common life as well as of learning. His quick eye saw every thing, his ready wit appropriated all to his service. Pigs scampering away from the sty, meat boiling up in the pot, the shepherd with his flock, the "eastern sky all roseate," — images repulsive, or full of beauty and gracefulness, are chosen with equal freedom, when they suit his purpose of presenting a distinct picture.

Charon, "that grim ferryman that poets write of," could not have been portrayed with more vividness by Michel Angelo; — "an old man, hoary white with eld," with "shaggy

cheeks, and eyes of burning coal." Cerberus, the cruel triple-headed monster, is more distinct than in Virgil.

"His eyes glare crimson, black his unctuous beard,  
His belly large, and clawed the hands with which  
He tears the spirits, flays them, and their limbs  
Piecemeal disparts." — *Inferno*, Canto vi.

It is needless to multiply examples of what is so evident. "Michel Angelo," says Coleridge, "is said to have made a design for every page of the Divine Comedy."

Another cause of the rapid and wide-spread fame of the poem is, no doubt, to be found in the individual interest inspired by the poet's narration, and the proximity of many events which are commemorated to Dante's own time. He is no fictitious being who is describing fictitious joys and woes. He invokes no Muse to make revelations, but only to help him remember and tell what he saw. He details the battles and wanderings of no fabulous Achilles or Æneas; but he himself, Dante Alighieri, sometime citizen and magistrate of the renowned city Florence, had gone bodily through the gloomy kingdom of despair, and up even to the tenth heaven. He makes your flesh creep on your bones, and your blood curdle and freeze; yet not as a romancer would, but as one who should depict the carnage of a terrible battle, or the tortures of the Inquisition. He was not relating amusing or fearful stories, but telling in plain language what he saw with his own eyes and heard with his own ears. Marco Polo, just returned to Venice from Tartary and China, had travelled far and seen wonderful things, but not so wonderful as these, for "*he* was the man who had been in hell"; and Marco Polo could not narrate the marvels of China and Japan with more gravity, and with an air of more sober verity, than he did the events of *his* pilgrimage, albeit he told them in the language of poetry. He himself had read the gloomy inscription on the dusky portal of the world of sorrow. He had been ferried "over the livid lake." He had climbed up the shaggy back of Lucifer. Not a score of years had passed since those walked the earth and did business with their fellows, who now were frozen in seas of ice, or burning in molten pitch, or praising God in heaven, — and he had seen them there. He had actually seen Farinata degli Uberti rising up in his burning sepulchre,

“but changing not his countenance stern,  
Nor moving the neck, nor bending his ribbed side,”

as if “in high scorn he held e’en hell”; and close beside him, “peering forth from the unclosed jaw,” “leaning upon his knees upraised,” Cavalcante Cavalcanti. And who was Farinata, but a distinguished general and statesman, by whom, only five years before Dante’s birth, Florence itself had been taken, and by whose nobleness it had been saved from destruction? And who was Cavalcante, but a distinguished Florentine, — and both of them as well known to the contemporaries of the poet as Jefferson and Burr are to us? The Ugolino whom he interrupted in his horrid repast was the very one who, when Dante was twenty-four years old, had been starved to death with his children, “unshrived by priest or friar,” in the vaults of that tower at Pisa which ever after was called the Tower of Famine. And Beatrice, who led him through Paradise, was the very Beatrice, known to half Florence, who was the early and sole idol of his heart.

It is generally thought necessary to lay the scenes of a poem in a distant age, so that the imagination shall not be shackled, and the broad light of actual fact shall not dispel the splendid illusions of our poetic dreams. But Dante derived an advantage from the very familiarity and publicity of his personages, in respect to the vivid reality of the impression; while his plan did not compel him to dwell long upon an individual, allowed him to seize those few events in his life which were capable of being presented with poetic effect, and at any moment, by commanding the presence of some ancient hero or martyr, he could temper the broad daylight of familiar facts with the sombre and mingling shadows of evening. The power of the imagination is none the less real because we know that the scenes portrayed by it are fictitious. The Mysteries of Udolpho would be no more agitating, if we were assured that every part of the story was as true as Hume’s History, or a great deal truer. We might learn from it different lessons; we might form different opinions of the virtues and vices of the age; but, if any thing, we should be less startled, because the “Mysteries” would be in a great measure dissipated; there would be less room for the monstrous and shapeless images of terror to stalk abroad in the dim twilight; the power of the narration does not depend upon its truth or falsity, but on the heartiness of the



assent which we yield to the demand on our sensibilities. The imagination requires congruity, and not absolute fact ; and we demand of the poet that he should be an artist, a *poet*, and not a historian, or biographer, or annalist. This mighty power of the imagination Dante brought to bear upon the most solemn realities. We know the strong tendency of the mind to form some picture of the future state, — to render definite those dim and vague phantoms which oppress a guilty soul, as well as the visions of joy which comfort the penitent. The poet satisfied those strong yearnings of the common heart. He interpreted its feelings ; its dumb voice spake ; its blind eye saw. Henceforth, the picture of the eternal world, whether portrayed by the painter, or half conceived by the vulgar and common fancy, must be formed according to the pattern shown by the sombre genius of the exiled Florentine.

In the profound and various intellect and the ever-sympathizing heart of the poet are to be found the great causes of the lasting honor of the poem. It is a creation of his genius, not a mechanical aggregation. An inward light guided him on to immortality. We can see, even now, that serious face, that placid, introverted eye, that hollow cheek, that lip which *would* curl, that chin which *would* quiver, under the concentrated bitterness, not of envy and malignity, but of disappointment and distress. The actors in the busy and turbulent scenes of his day have been dead these six hundred years. The republics have been in their graves almost as long. The great families which reaped the honors of the state, and with their deadly feuds made every town the scene of intestine war, have become extinct, and the age itself is, to the common reader, almost fabulous ; but the Divine Comedy is still the great poem of Italy. Still must men wonder at, and admire, and love that mighty and sorrowful spirit, to whom, for wise ends, it was given to sing of hell, and purgatory, and paradise. Perhaps without him Milton would never, with more perfect art and a purer theology, have attempted a loftier, if not more touching, theme. But for him, Michel Angelo, a sombre and kindred genius, might never have left the record of his thoughts and feelings in the sublimest and most awful scene that the pencil ever portrayed.

We may seem, in our brief review, to have been indiscrim-

inate in our praise, and to have forgotten our duty as critics. In truth, we have not been careful to pick out the foibles and faults, where there is so much to command our enthusiasm and love. It would not be difficult to speak of the grotesqueness and occasional grossness of the *Inferno* ; to condemn the mingling of Christian truth with heathen fiction ; to revive some old charge of ill-nature in the poet. We might doubtless have found traces of obstinate pride, of fiery temper, of sarcastic wit. All these he had by nature ; and what wonder, if, in his adverse lot, they sometimes got the better of him ? But we have not time for such criticism, and it would do our hearts little good to engage in it. The faults in temper, in taste, in art, in morals (if there are any), have long since, for all practical effect, sunk to the bottom, while the beautiful and the good are borne on the full current by our doors, for our blessing. Some, we know, do not see these beautiful and good gifts. The waters are to them always turbid, and the stream itself is neither wide nor deep. That in the poet which is earthy they detect, with the true sagacity of earth-worms ; that which is divine they see not. They compare him with others only to find a deficiency. He is not so simple and natural as Homer, not so polished as Virgil, not so sublime as Milton, not so universal and healthful as Shakspeare. It may be not ; but let us love him for what he has, not neglect him for what he has not. All men of genius have not the same gifts, nor the same glory. We may forget that in him which reminds us of the earth, dust, and ashes of our humanity, and cling to that which savors of the ethereal, as a unique and immortal possession. By looking coldly or carelessly upon him, it is ourselves that we injure, and not him. He who has been growing great with the reverence of centuries, and is yet a modern, will receive little injury in his fame by our censure ; but we may lose much by our lack of sympathy. If we look in Dante for choice phrases, and delicate words, and the gems of the lyric, we shall most likely be disappointed ; for these are not his peculiarity. He had in a measure to form his language. He found it rude, amorphous ; he stamped upon it an immortal signature of genius. He doubted whether he should not write in Latin. Happily, he did not ; but we must not be surprised, if, with all the plainness and directness of thought, his expressions are many times inverted and obscure. But

let us look for the intense feeling, the affluent imagination, the brilliant and varied fancy, the endless invention, and the great spirit which broods over and informs the whole, and we cannot be mistaken or disappointed. What, of all the products of the *thought* of his time, has come down to us, comparable to his poem? Something of the form and spirit of every great poet, as we have said, belongs to his own age and nation. We cannot relish Homer, or Sophocles, just as the Greeks did who heard the Iliad chanted at their festivals, and saw the Œdipus Tyrannus at the theatre, because the spirit of ancient art is diverse from that of the modern. Not even Chaucer or Spenser seem to us just as they did to their contemporaries. We cannot so inwrap ourselves in antiquity, that our thoughts, our sentiments, our spirit shall be ancient. Something of the spirit of every great poet is eternal. He unlocks the fountains of tears or of joy, which are peculiar to no nation, to no age. The glories of Achilles, and the sorrows of Priam, are not the property of time. Homer and Sophocles, Chaucer and Spenser, are our friends. They are not antiquated, — their hearts are not; and, with all the great brotherhood of poets, they are linked to us by the golden chain of sympathies and affections. A great poet *is* the greatest of gifts to any people. He remains ever with us to inspire and instruct. He opens to us new worlds; of our dim imaginings makes clear and palpable realities; gives us new sources of pleasure; draws us up from pursuits whose end is our present physical comfort, to clearer, calmer, more lofty and spiritual joys and hopes. There are hopes which take hold on eternity, fears which chill the heart, passions which scorch and wither the soul, and no words to give them utterance. There they lie in the common heart, — dim, unrecognized, half-formed. The all-sympathizing poet, by a magic word, unlocks the imprisoned sympathies and bids them be free. To our dull eyes the earth is a desert, or a field for common toil; but he touches our eyes, and earth and sky are apparelled in glory. We remember our forgotten dreams. We think again of our nature and our destiny.

“ Though inland far we be,  
Our souls have sight of that immortal sea  
Which brought us hither,  
Can in a moment travel thither,  
And see the children sport upon the shore,  
And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore.”

“ The appointed aim of art,” says Hegel, “ is to awake and give vitality to all slumbering feelings, affections, and passions ; to fill and expand the heart, and to make man, whether developed or undeveloped, feel in every fibre of his being *all* that human nature can endure, experience, and bring forth in her inmost and most secret recesses ; *all* that has power to move and arouse the heart of man in its profoundest depths, manifold capabilities, and various phases ; to garner up for our enjoyment whatever, in the exercise of thought and imagination, the mind discovers of high and intrinsic merit, the *grandeur* of the lofty, the eternal, and the true, and present it to our feeling and contemplation. In like manner, to make pain and sorrow, and even vice and wrong, become clear to us ; to bring the heart into immediate acquaintance with the awful and the terrible, as well as with the joyous and pleasurable ; and, lastly, to lead the fancy to hover gently, dreamily, on the wings of imagination, and entice her to revel in the seductive witchery of its voluptuous emotion and contemplation. Art should employ this manifold richness of its subject-matter to supply, on the one hand, the deficiencies of our actual experience of external life, and, on the other hand, to excite in us those passions which shall cause the actual events of life to move us more deeply, and awaken our susceptibility for receiving impressions of all kinds.”—*Æsthetik*, B. I.

Those who are gifted with the highest power of art come not often. The song of Dante for these five hundred years has been touching the hearts of men, and it is as fresh as at the beginning. When shall its melody die away, “ be lost in silence and forgot ” ?

We might dwell much more minutely on the lessons, some of them very practical, to be drawn from this poem, and inquire how far it exhibits the learning of the age, the astrology, astronomy, natural philosophy, and theology ; how far, remarkable as it is for historical accuracy, it gives the true public spirit of the times, and the general belief and practice of the Roman church ; or, in literature, how far the genius of the poet tended to awaken that of Petrarch and Boccaccio (both of whom were born before he died), and hastened that revival of learning, so efficient ultimately in breaking the chains of the Popish hierarchy ; and, paramount to all, might we dwell on the abundant lessons which those ill-governed states transmit to us. But these and kindred topics would draw us much beyond any reasonable limits.

The ashes of Dante still rest at Ravenna. The urn which

once contained them, and on which was engraved the memorial which he himself penned, —

“ Hic claudor Dantes patriis extorris ab oris,  
Quem genuit parvi Florentia mater amoris,” —

that urn is gone, and a rich tomb has taken its place. His cenotaph is to be seen in Santa Croce, the august mausoleum of the greatest and best Florentines, — of Galileo, Michel Angelo, Machiavelli, and Alfieri ; and his name and fame are among the very richest legacies which the turbulent days of the republics have left, not to Italy alone, but to the world.

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ART. IV. — *Despatches of Lord Stanley, Colonial Secretary, to Sir William Colebrooke, Lieutenant-Governor of New Brunswick, and to Lord Falkland, Lieutenant-Governor of Nova Scotia, March 30th, and September 17th, 1845. Published by Authority in the Royal Gazettes of those Colonies.*

OF the maritime powers of modern Europe, there is scarcely one that does not owe much of its commercial prosperity to its fisheries. Some fugitives from the wrath of the monster Attila fled to the isles of the Adriatic, where of necessity they adopted the avocation of fishermen. By this employment steadily continued, Venice in a few centuries became renowned for her wealth, commerce, and naval strength. The origin of the republic was annually celebrated for a long period ; and the omission or refusal of a Doge to provide the customary banquet, and to submit to the fishermen's embrace, allowed by his predecessors on this national festival, made the name of Contarini hateful, and wellnigh caused the subversion of all legal restraint and the overthrow of the ruling family. Genoa, too, grew rich and powerful by a similar course of industry, and, not content with her own limited fishing-grounds, undertook the conquest of others ; usurping the fisheries of the regions of the Bosphorus, she captured and for a while awed into submission their rightful owners.